

BANNER

Building on the Tithe

BY JORDAN J. BALLOR

The congregation to which I belong is considering launching a building project. It's an increasingly common circumstance. The merits of this particular plan are no less worthy than those used to justify other church building projects. The fact is, my congregation is getting too big for its physical facilities, at least as they are currently used.

Given the number of members in our congregation, the square footage of our church building is probably on the low end when compared to facilities used by other North American congregations. But I can't help wondering whether our frame of reference is too narrow. Why should we only compare our needs to those of other North American churches?

What about the church in other countries, especially in the developing world? Sometimes congregations share one Bible. Often there are no pews to sit in, no ornate gold goblets with which to commune. Many communities don't even have a building in which to worship.

In North America the conflict we face is largely between spending our leisure or disposable income on ourselves and spending it on others. If a congregation determines that a particular building project is a legitimate need for its ministry, it shouldn't hesi-

tate to pursue the plan. But it should also actively consider the situations of Christians around the world. Instead of an "either/or" framework, let's work with a "both/and" attitude.

A place to start would be to apply the principle of the tithe to building projects. If, for example, a needed building was projected to cost \$1 million, the local congregation could pledge an additional \$100,000 to building and mission projects abroad. Because American and Canadian dollars

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often have greater buying power in developing nations, smaller amounts can go much further than they would in North America. A tithing guide certainly should not be a ceiling to aid for Christians abroad, but it might be a workable starting point for widening the perspective of our churches.

Whatever our various churches in different situations choose to do, we should look to the example of the churches in Macedonia, who were blessed with plenty. As Paul writes of the need in Jerusalem, the Macedonian church "gave as much as they were able, and even

beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (2 Cor. 8:3-4).

Let us pray that we might be so generous.

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